



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION IX  
75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Gerald Moritz, EIS Project Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
Winnemucca Field Office  
5100 E. Winnemucca Blvd.  
Winnemucca, NV 89445

JAN 14 1999

Dear Mr. Moritz:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Sonoma-Gerlach and Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Black Rock Desert (DEIS). Our review is pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

In the DEIS, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identifies four alternatives for the management of the Black Rock Desert, including "no action." BLM has identified the Proposed Action as its preferred alternative. The Proposed Action includes multiple land management strategies to minimize adverse impacts to cultural and natural resources in the area, most notably establishment of a 452,086 acre Area of Critical Environmental Concern, implementation of a "common pool" system for recreational permits, off highway vehicle (OHV) restrictions, and a 3500 acre mineral withdrawal.

EPA has assigned a rating of EC-2 (Environmental Concerns--Insufficient Information) to this DEIS based on concerns involving the proposed management strategies for large-scale events. In our view, the DEIS fails to establish a nexus between the potential impacts associated with large-scale events and the proposed management strategies designed to address these impacts. The proposed "common pool" system for recreational permits, in particular, appears arbitrary and misdirected. By contrast, the description of impacts associated with OHV use clearly establishes the need for specific management provisions to minimize adverse impacts, and we encourage BLM to implement necessary protective measures at the earliest possible opportunity.

In our opinion, the DEIS is insufficient to support a decision on issues related to large scale events. In the case of the Burning Man event, the BLM has new information concerning the scope of impacts stemming from the 1998 event which had an attendance of approximately 15,000 participants. BLM's evaluation of the environmental impacts associated with the most recent Burning Man event, including its evaluation of actions taken by the event organizers to minimize impacts, mitigate impacts, and prevent such impacts through education efforts directed at event participants, is highly relevant to any decision which would attempt to place a cap on the number of participants or "user days."

*EPA expressed env. concerns w. the proposed "common pool" system for permitting large-scale events. Cum. Imp. to the playa surface, excluding fragile "edge areas" & other sensitive resources should be addressed in the FEIS.*

To correct this deficiency, we recommend that BLM issue a supplemental report that can be appended to the Final EIS which includes a detailed description of the actual environmental impacts which resulted from each of the large scale events held during 1998. We further recommend that BLM provide an additional public comment period so that the public will have an adequate opportunity to review and comment on the new information. Finally, we recommend that BLM schedule additional public meetings in San Francisco and other cities to give Burning Man participants the opportunity to express their views concerning the proposed management strategies and their potential impact on the future of the event. As described in the document, the Black Rock Desert has been "discovered" by people across the nation and throughout the world--it is important that the BLM carefully consider the views of all of the citizens who use the public lands.

Another option would be to issue a separate management plan for large-scale events that are limited in scope to the playa, excluding the fragile "edge areas" and other sensitive resources described in the document. Events such as Burning Man occur in a confined space which can be controlled by event organizers and land managers to prevent the types of impacts associated with more dispersed forms of recreation such as OHV use. Restricting other large-scale events to areas which are not likely to exhibit resource degradation would reduce the need to establish caps on visitor days.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this DEIS. If you have questions about this letter, please contact Leonidas Payne of my staff at (415) 744-1571.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David J. Farrel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David J. Farrel, Chief  
Federal Activities Office